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PAGE 1 25X6

MEMORANDUM FOR:

SUBJECT: The Impact of Resistance by Shariat-Madari's Followers on Khomeini's Leadership

1. We believe Khomeini has a limited capacity to deal with more than one major problem at a time. The uprising by Shariat-Madari's followers in Azarbayan coming hard on the heels of smaller uprisings in Kurdistan, Khurestan, and Baluchistan drew Khomeini's primary focus of attention away from the hostages and his confrontation with the US. During this period of time, there was an apparent lull and seeming movement toward more moderate pastures, as exemplified by Khomeini's agreement to permit visitors to the hostages and his temporary shift from trial of the hostages to an international tribunal. We believe that while Khomeini was diverted by the political instability in Iran's periphery, the more pragmatic members of his entourage were temporarily given a wider latitude for action and may well have had greater influence upon Khomeini.

2. Although internal difficulties in general are distracting, a sustained uprising in Azarbayan under the leadership of Shariat-Madari would be particularly threatening. For [redacted]

[redacted] political reasons, Khomeini's typical reactions to internal threat have been to place the blame on an outside enemy. But this has proven particularly problematic in the current situation. [redacted]

politically [redacted] it threatens his self-proclaimed position as the leader of a unified nation of 35,000,000. Moreover, Khomeini has highly ambivalent feelings concerning Ayatollah Shariat-Madari. Indeed, he may owe his life to Shariat-Madari. It is reported that it was Shariat-Madari who elevated Khomeini to the rank of Ayatollah in 1963, thus sparing him from execution at the hands of SAVAK. Shariat-Madari is also renowned for his expertise in religious scholarship while Khomeini is generally regarded to have a less profound understanding of Islamic thought. Thus, the possibility of Shariat-Madari branding Khomeini in violation of Islamic law is particularly threatening. It was in response to these mixed feelings that Khomeini made a gesture of respect to Shariat-Madari when he first returned to Iran and then made an apparently conciliatory visit to Shariat-Madari after one of his guards was killed in the December 5th uprising by Khomeini's supporters. But afterwards he resorted to his characteristic tactic

25X6

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of branding his opponent as anti-Islamic counterrevolutionaries, tools of a nefarious imperialist power. The tactic failed on this occasion and will continue to do so, for it was quickly countered by the weight of Shariat-Madari's authority.

3. Khomeini has for the present successfully neutralized Shariat-Madari, who is now effectively under house arrest. Furthermore, at least in the past, Shariat-Madari has backed away from outright confrontation with Khomeini. However he has always been concerned that Khomeini's short-sighted leadership and the domination of the political process by the clergy would lead ultimately to the elimination of the Iranian religious establishment and perhaps even the dissolution of the country. With the spontaneous uprising in Azarbayjan, he is also faced with the problem that he could be out-stripped by his followers. The pressure of recent events has led Shariat-Madari to make his most forceful stand to date.

4. Should circumstances develop that Shariat-Madari is persuaded of the need more actively to confront Khomeini and that he would be supported in this effort, there is every chance that the moderate leadership of the established clergy who share his concerns might also dissent openly. Until now, a number of senior ayatollahs have muted their dissent in light of Khomeini's popularity with the masses. But as the radical--and in traditional eyes, unqualified--clergy who took control of the revolution last August appear to be moving Iran closer to civil war and perhaps an eventual leftist victory, they might feel emboldened to join Shariat-Madari in protest.

5. The report that Ayatollah Khoi has come out in support of Shariat-Madari and had circulated a written document among the Shiite religious community attesting to this suggests an important avenue of approach. Read by the media of this important support, particularly radio, could provide an important enhancement to Shariat-Madari's support, and might encourage Shariat-Madari further in his efforts to become a focal rallying point.

6. A sustained uprising in Azarbayjan would continually drain Khomeini's attention, and might diminish his iron hold on leadership decisions. Although this on the one hand could give greater latitude to the more pragmatic members of his entourage, as it apparently did during the recent lull, this does not of course necessarily mean that the captors' determination would be weakened. Nevertheless, it would seem to be an avenue worth exploring.

25X1

21 December 1979